

# Reminiscences

By H. P. Douglas

LOOKING back over rather a long ski life two interesting experiences come to mind. Several years ago we were holding our major annual competition on the old Montreal Ski Club hill and anticipating the usual difficulty in drawing a good crowd of cash spectators within the gates, conditions then being just as they are now. A few days before our competition, I noticed in a Western paper that one Sigmund Rudd of Duluth, Minn., a professional skier, was doing a somersault on skis and drawing crowds to the ski exhibitions throughout the West. Terms were arranged quickly by wire, and his dare-devil act being well advertised in our local papers, a record paid attendance was on hand to see him. In between the regular jumping, and after the proper bally-hoo and introduction, he went up on the tower, put on a short pair of light skis, the bugle blew, down he shot out in the air, did his somersault, made a good landing and got a tremendous round of applause from the crowd.

The stunt made a great hit and there were insistent demands for an encore. Rudd, however, who was out for the money, refused to go on again unless we doubled his fee, which we were loath to do, and we were having a hot argument with him in the shanty, our only clubhouse, at the bottom of the hill.

One of our regular visiting jumpers in those days, and one of the best we have ever had here, was Adolph Olsen, from Berlin Mills, a little man of forty and over, always recognized by his red suspenders.

Old Adolph liked his little drink and the more he took the better he jumped, and on this day he had consumed a fair ration and probably a little more. He was sitting quietly in the corner by the stove listening in to the argument and when Rudd definitely refused to repeat, Adolph said to me in his best Norwegian English "Py yimminy, give me one leetle drink more and I do that yump."

The crowd was clamoring for an encore, so we gave him another. He made his weaving way up the tower, fastened on his long, heavy, three-groove jumping skis, the bugle blew and down he came. Our hearts were in our mouth, we feared we had a case of murder on our hands, as he had never even heard of a somersault jump before, and we stood in fear and trembling at the bottom of the hill. Out over the landing he sailed, did a perfect somersault, finishing with a snappy christie, his only comment being "I tink I have anuder leetle drink."

This was the nerviest stunt on skis I had ever seen or heard of.

Now a quick jump to New York City for the other. During the war I happened to be down there one day and walking up Sixth Avenue in the early afternoon was stopped in front of the Hippodrome, by seeing huge posters, gaily colored, advertising a ski jumping exhibition as part of a winter carnival they were featuring. The gorgeous painted posters pictured a typical Alpine resort, in the foreground a great throng of skiers, skaters and spectators; in back towering snow-clad mountains. Standing high on top of a hill, a ski jumper poised for his dash down the mountain side, all most beautifully done.

The text advertised that the Hippodrome at great expense had brought direct from Norway three world famous ski jumpers who, each afternoon and evening, would do their death-defying jump across the enormous stage, etc. All this, of course, interested me greatly, and upon asking at the box office for the manager was taken to his office and most courteously received. Upon hearing I was from Montreal and President of our Ski Club, I was invited back stage.

Upon examining the mechanism of the jump I discovered leading partly across the rear of the stage from the top of a most realistic canvas painted Alpine mountain, a hundred feet high, a steep narrow trough, the width of two skis, well greased and slippery as ice. When the bugle blew the jumper came down this chute to a take-off in the middle of the stage, made his jump across, disappeared into the wings, and was caught by a gang of husky stage hands in a great reinforced rope net.

"Wouldn't you like to meet our ski jumper, you may be able to cheer him up?" the manager asked. So I was taken to the dressing-room and met the lone surviving ski jumper sitting disconsolately, head in hand, on his cot, and when he learned I was a brother skier he literally fell upon my neck and wept.

From his halting English I gradually learned that this form of jumping was beset with many dangers not encountered in the great outdoors upon the snow-clad hills of good old Norway, the chief being the "Tam Net." His two companions were in the hospital badly bunged up, while he was just able to hobble about but carrying on so as to collect their salary every Saturday night.

I went out in front and saw his act, most thrilling and realistic, the jump down and across the stage, some ninety feet, done in really splendid form and at terrific speed, and the applause from the enthusiastic capacity house deafening. Sitting comfortably in the theatre I could not but picture the nervy little man, all bruised and bandaged up, when he and his seven-foot jumpers hit that net in one grand smashing tangle. Later we had some cheering drinks together and as we parted he said with a sad gesture of farewell—"That tam net she is too tuff for the jumpers."